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THE TRIUMPHS OF LIBERALISM.

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HAVE BEEN GAINED.

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THE TRIUMPHS OF LIBERALISM.

I.—THE GIVING OF THE VOTE.

IN no department of life to a greater degree than in politics is the old truth more frequently made apparent that gratitude is a lively sense of favours to come. A party is asked not what it has done, but what it means to do; and, though it may have struggled hard and even exhausted itself in efforts to do well, its rivals, who have done nothing but who promise to do better, may reap success. As Liberalism is a policy of moving forward, this is not altogether a bad state of things; and yet there should always be borne in memory what a party has performed, for from that can best be judged whether its promises are likely to be fulfilled. "By their fruits ye shall know them"; and we propose to show that the fruits of Liberalism have been so excellent in securing the liberties and strengthening the rights of all our citizens that that party thoroughly deserves not only gratitude for the past, but support in the present and trust for the future.

At the very root of the Liberal policy has always been the desire that the people should enjoy the fullest and freest rights of self-government, both municipal and parliamentary; and hence the Liberals are the party whom the people have to thank for the vote as they now possess it. In the earliest period of representative institutions in this country, the vote—or "voice" as it was originally and accurately called—was possessed by every freeholder in a county and householder in a borough who put in an appearance at the nomination, and who there emitted his shout or raised his hand in

favour of a certain candidate. The householder vote, indeed, was upon so very broad a basis, that it was enjoyed by every man who lit a fire upon which to boil a pot ; and hence the term for these voters of "potwallers" or "potwallopers," which in the course of centuries passed into a name of derision.

As time went on and the House of Commons became more and more important, means were gradually taken to lessen the direct influence of the voters, particularly in the smaller boroughs. Sometimes by direct interference of the Crown by the alteration of a charter, and often by the steadily pursued illegality of the local authorities, the voting was taken out of the hands of the householders generally, and vested in those of the borough corporation or some similar virtually self-elected group. This was not done only to strengthen the power of the members of such bodies, but to prevent the money lavishly spent by the peers and plutocrats who were the "patrons" of the many pocket-boroughs, from being spread over too large a number of beneficiaries ; and in the eighteenth century particularly this process went on, until, by the time of the Reform Bill of 1832, there were very few truly open boroughs left.

All this was changed by the Liberal party in the great measure just named, which swept away the system of election of members of Parliament by corporations in towns, giving the franchise to every householder paying a certain rental, and admitting tenants as well as freeholders to the county franchise. This was an enormous step in advance ; but it was made even more effective by the compilation each year of a register of electors, which enabled the possessor of a vote to cast his suffrage at a contest without cost or hindrance. Before 1832, each would-be voter had to prove his qualifications at the polling booth, which, in the case of a county freeholder, was a dilatory, inquisitorial, and often expensive process, as he had to produce his title-deeds for inspection, and legal wrangles

over these were frequent and severe. The Liberal Party, therefore, not merely restored to the boroughs the householder vote which had largely been lost, but rendered the freeholder vote in the counties the more easily and effectively to be given.

Not content however with these important reforms, the Liberals steadily pursued the work of broadening and thus strengthening the base of our parliamentary franchise; and, although very many hindrances stood in the way and prevented progress in this direction being made as promptly as had been desired, it was the House of Commons of 1867 containing a Liberal majority, which constrained a Tory Ministry—temporarily in office because of a soon-healed split among their opponents—to pass a measure greatly extending the tenancy vote in the counties and conferring a full measure of household suffrage upon the boroughs, at the same time admitting lodgers to the franchise. And eighteen years later the edifice was crowned by the sweeping away, by a Liberal Parliament and a Liberal Administration, of all distinction between the tenancy qualification in the counties and the boroughs and the giving of household suffrage to the former upon the same conditions as the later.

But, though this ensured that, in the main, the parliamentary representation of this country—as far as the elected and responsible House of the Legislature is concerned—was placed under the direct control of the whole body of the people, it is not to be thought that the edifice is so absolutely perfect that it stands in no need of reform. Many anomalies remain in regard to the law of registration, and particularly with reference to changes of residence, which annually entail upon a very large number of citizens the loss of votes which they fully deserve. These difficulties should be removed in order to allow every duly qualified person to be certain of being placed upon the voters' list; and all trivial technicalities which serve to keep

him off should be swept away. As a consequence, the old Radical ideal of manhood suffrage and "one man, one vote"—always excepting peers, paupers, criminals, and lunatics—would be within measurable distance of being reached. And when it is reached, it will assuredly be through the exertions of that same Liberal Party to whom hundreds of thousands are to-day indebted for having the vote.

II.—THE PROTECTION OF THE VOTER.

WHILE it is well that manhood suffrage—which means, as has been said, the conferring of Parliamentary franchise upon every man of full age except peers, paupers, criminals, and lunatics—should be within measurable distance of being accomplished in this country, it is equally desirable to ensure that the vote can be given freely and without fear of evil consequence. On the face of it, the possession of a vote would be perilous if it entailed certain and serious loss; and the Liberal Party, having acted as the pioneers in providing a full franchise, did that which was the necessary consequence—though in the teeth of obstinate opposition from the Tories right through—in enabling the vote to be given by a process which should secure the voter from harm.

Vote by ballot is no new-fangled notion in Great Britain, as has often been suggested by those who dislike the protection it affords the elector: and it has been urged from the very earliest times when the Liberal Party began to take the political field. It was advocated by the Radicals before the passing of the great Reform Bill, and it was even included in the original draft of that freedom-giving measure, though withdrawn before its introduction in the House of Commons under pressure from those who recognized, and with some reason, that the ship was already bearing all she possibly could carry.

At that moment, indeed, when large popular constituencies were few, and most of the members were chosen by individual peers or close corporations, there had not been realized the vital necessity that existed for secret voting under an extended franchise.

Experience, however, of the General Election of 1832, the first held under the new system, compelled the question to be looked in the face by many who previously had put it aside. It was found that the peers and the plutocrats, deprived by the Reform Act of the greater portion of their old electoral power, would be able largely to recover it, not only by the coarse method of bribery, but by the more cruel and lasting one of intimidation. Eviction was the weapon used to crush the Liberal tenant in the counties just as "exclusive dealing" was employed to ruin the Liberal tradesman in the towns, with the natural and intended consequence that many a farmer who did not want to be thrown on the roadside, and shopkeeper who had no wish to end his days in the workhouse, either stayed away from the polls or voted as their petty tyrants desired.

It is easy to-day for those who are not placed in a similar position of trial to condemn such men as cowards, just as it was easy then for glib speakers and writers, having nothing themselves to lose, but often all to gain, by openly taking a side, to do the like. But, while no praise could be too high for those courageous souls in every part of the country who withstood such illicit influences right through, it became increasingly obvious to the Liberal Party as a whole, that it was worse than a mockery to give a vote to men in order that they might take a fitting share in the government of the nation, and then expose them to the systematic malice of their political adversaries by forcing them to declare in public how they exercised their suffrage. Liberals, indeed, realized that to many of these men it was not merely a matter of personal inconvenience, though that was much, nor of

pecuniary loss, though that was more, but even of life and death—

You take my life

When you do take the means whereby I live—
and that was most.

But the Liberals and Radicals of that time had a long and often a disheartening fight before they could persuade Parliament to remedy this ill. As long ago as the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, when men were martyred at Manchester at the bidding of a panic-stricken Tory magistracy, because they openly asked for Parliamentary Reform, the ballot was demanded ; and it was one of the points of the People's Charter. But the force of tradition, which has always had enormous weight in this country, was against it ; and that accounted for most of the lukewarmness with which in influential circles it was long regarded. Open voting had been a necessary consequence of the exercise of the suffrage in olden times from the very nature of its origin ; and, therefore, any suggestion of secrecy was denounced as "un-English," which, seeing the prevalence of the ballot in many daily concerns from the government of the Bank of England down to that of social clubs, was, as an argument, singularly feeble, though temporarily effective.

It was not, therefore, until household suffrage had been given to the towns, more than thirty-five years after the first Reform Act had extended the franchise in many directions, that open voting was doomed, though the names of Grote and Berkeley should never be forgotten as those of the men who kept the ballot torch burning during the whole of the intervening period. When the earliest and greatest of Mr. Gladstone's Administrations came into power, however, it did not allow even its first session to end before appointing a strong Parliamentary Committee, with one of its members, the eighth Duke of Devonshire (then the Marquis of Hartington) at its head, to consider the whole question. That body reported in 1870, that the ballot, if adopted, would probably not only promote tranquillity at

elections, but protect voters from undue influence, and introduce greater freedom and purity in voting, provided secrecy was made inviolable except in cases where a voter had been bribed or had given an invalid vote.

Mr. Gladstone's Government in the very next session brought in a Bill carrying out these ideas ; but the House of Lords, as scarcely need be explained, promptly threw it out, because it would have protected from intimidation the tenant-farmer equally with the tradesman, and the smaller agriculturist just as the working man. Nothing daunted, the Liberals carried it again through the Representative Chamber in 1872 ; and the Peers had then to swallow it, though they did so with such a bad grace that, in their impotent rage, they made it what is known as a temporary measure, and, therefore it has still to be renewed every year by the Expiring Laws Continuance Act.

But, though not a solitary Peer has ever had the pluck to propose that it be not re-enacted, their personal agents and political friends throughout the country continue to try by subterfuge to make the statute of no avail. Never an election comes round but they whisper to the more timorous voters that the ballot is not secret ; and this is a statement which all those who utter it have the best means of knowing to be untrue. The system in use in this country makes it possible to render voting perfectly secret, and yet provide for a scrutiny ; and this latter is a point that is essential, or, otherwise, the gravest electoral frauds might take place. The main point—and upon this special emphasis must be laid—is that the ballot is secret, and that voters to-day can exercise the franchise in perfect freedom because of the safeguards provided for them by the Liberal Party.

III.—FREEING THE PEOPLE'S FOOD.

To the Liberal Party, which in the main has assured for the people a governing share in the nation's concerns, and has ensured the giving of their vote in freedom, is also due the freeing of their food from the shackles of taxation, which used to render it both dear and scarce, and which are now threatened by the so-called "Tariff Reformers" to be put on once again. At the outset of the present Protectionist agitation, it used to be thought a good jest—so good as even to be paid for in pantomimes—to taunt the Liberals with telling the working-classes that, if they accepted a revival of Protection, "your food will cost you more"; but even when they venture to repeat that taunt now, they are aware—and the people should be aware—that all past experience proves that the statement is true.

In the old days, when the House of Commons was just as much a House of Landlords as is the House of Lords to-day, all great questions were looked at and dealt with principally from the landlord's point of view. They realised that, if corn were cheap, the profits of their tenants would be lessened, and their own rents reduced; and, as they believed that upon their own prosperity depended the well-being of the country, they determined to keep up by legislative enactment the price of corn. Step by step, they forced their ideas upon Parliament, and they went so far that, at the end of the great French war, nearly a hundred years ago, they prohibited the importation of all foreign corn when the price was below 80 shillings a quarter, and all colonial corn when it was below 67 shillings; and, as 36 shillings is now considered a high price, all can judge of the difference in dearness between the times of Protection and Free Trade.

But it was not only dearness that Protection brought in its train, but scarcity, and with

scarcity came substitutes of almost as repellent a kind as the horseflesh sausage, of which all have heard in certain "Protected" parts of the Continent. At the time when, under these old landlord-made laws, scarcity was at its height, and when the quartern loaf stood at twenty-two pence halfpenny instead of the sixpence at which it can be bought to-day, not only did the Government give a grant from the Civil List to a man "towards enabling him to prosecute a discovery made by him of a paste as a substitute for wheat flour," but another ingenious inventor set himself to prove that bread sufficiently good for the workers to subsist upon could be made out of sawdust! "Take," said he, "the inner round of the pine tree next the wood, in flakes like a sheet of foolscap paper, and steep or wash it in warm water to clear off its astringent principle. Then hang it across a rope to dry in the sun; and, when dry, pound it into small pieces, mixed with corn, and grind into meal on the hand-mill or quern." The inventor admitted that the sawdust was "certainly less palatable than flour," but he held that it was in no way disagreeable, and both wholesome and digestible as well as highly nutritive—and, in any case, it was obviously thought good enough for the working-classes.

It is said by the Protectionists of to-day that this scarcity was not due to the Corn Laws; but the evidence of those who lived in the days when the Corn Laws flourished was of a very different kind; and, as they were in the midst of the scarcity, they should be allowed to have known. Not long after the time just spoken of, "the directors and members of the Chamber of Manufactures and Commerce at Birmingham" petitioned the House of Commons "to take the subject of the Corn Laws into their early consideration, and to adopt such amendments of the existing system as may be calculated to promote the welfare and prosperity of the mercantile and manufacturing classes of the nation." They assuredly would not have done this if such

welfare and prosperity had not been injured by the Corn Laws ; and it is as interesting to the constituents of Mr. Balfour as it is to those of Mr. Chamberlain, to know that London, when suffering under the old Protective system, felt the same as Birmingham.

No more concise and yet complete condemnation, indeed, of the whole system of food taxation can be imagined than the resolution which was adopted at a meeting of the Court of Common Council of London held in 1842, when Protection was in full swing, and which ran thus : “ That the continued and increasing depression of the manufacturing, commercial, and agricultural interests of this country, and the wide-spreading distress of the working-classes are most alarming ; manufacturers without a market, and shipping without freight ; capital without investment, trade without profit. and farmers struggling under a system of high rents ; Corn Laws to restrain the importation of food, and inducing a starving people to regard the laws of their country with a deep sense of their injustice ; and that this Court anxiously appeals to the First Minister of the Crown to give practical effect to his declarations in favour of Free Trade by bringing forward at the earliest possible period such measures for securing the unrestricted supply of food and the employment of the people as may effectually remove a condition of depression and distress too widely prevailing to co-exist with the safety and the preservation of our social and political institutions.”

Now, this is what was said by the leading citizens of London and Birmingham concerning the fruits of Protection at the moment they were in full bloom ; and it was against such a system that those eminent Liberals, Cobden, Bright, and Villiers, struck hard and crushing blows which, when aided by so Liberal a Conservative as Sir Robert Peel, and his chief henchman, Mr. Gladstone, brought down the old selfish and starvation-making edifice. And

it must be remembered that not only was corn involved in the great reforms secured from the Legislature by Peel and Gladstone. All kinds of food were taxed in the old Tory days, apples and onions and herrings being particularly marked out for imposts, just as they would be now, as well as meat of every sort, if the Protectionists had their way. And with what effect? That once more, in order to fill the pockets of a few, the working classes would have to go without sufficient food. That once more a great poet would have scornfully to exclaim—

For what were all these country patriots born?
To hunt, and vote, and raise the price of corn.

That once more might have to be read in the House of Commons the scathing lines—

I met Famine on my way,
Prowling for her human prey,
And I heard the hag proclaim,
“Bread Tax is my sceptre’s name!”

It is owing in the main degree to the Liberal Party that the cause for these old and bitter and well-founded complaints has been removed; and under no circumstances will they consent to its reinstatement.

IV.—FREEING THE PEOPLE’S ACTION.

IF Liberalism had contented itself with securing for the people the right to legislate for themselves and the opportunity to eat untaxed bread, it would have done much; but in its efforts to free the people’s thought and action it has done more. For it is impossible for a country truly to enjoy liberty if its inhabitants are kept in ignorance of what is passing around; and the only effective method of dispelling that ignorance is by freedom of the press and the platform. And it is mainly owing to the efforts of generations of Liberals that our press and our platform are as free as they are to-day.

The idea of a free public meeting may, of course, be claimed to be as old as the earliest stage of the British Constitution, for it is from the folk moot—or assembly of the people—that our present system of representative government has gradually come forth. But, in the course of centuries, though the public meeting, and under that very name, continued to be recognized, its liberty was gradually encroached upon; and it is only within a comparatively recent period that it has been fully regained. The only danger to it in these times is not from the exercise of any arbitrary power on the part of the Monarch, the Ministry, or even the Parliamentary majority of the day, but from any small section which in the effort to secure something they desire, wantonly disturb or break up assemblies to which they have not been invited or at which they have no right.

But much more is done in the way of educating the people in public affairs by the press than by the platform, for the newspaper is always with them, and the speaker only seldom. It is, therefore, even of greater importance that the former should be free, and in various ways the Liberal Party has continuously striven to secure it. The greatest of Puritan writers, John Milton, demanded in imperishable tones the liberty of the press. The earliest of Liberal monarchs, William III., first gave the newspapers their freedom. The cry of “Wilkes and Liberty” was raised to secure that freedom’s retention. And, down to the present time, every attempt to strike a further shackle from the limbs of the press has met with energetic Liberal support.

How many such shackles there have been, and in what way and by what men they have been removed, are not generally known, but the historian of the British press who understands politics will always assign to William Ewart Gladstone the greatest share in their disappearance. By the abolition of the duty on advertisements, that illustrious Liberal statesman

did much not only for newspapers, but for the nation, in giving even the poorest the chance to circulate in the most effective way a statement of his wishes or his wants. Mr. Gladstone did much more than this, however, when he repealed the tax upon paper, for that enabled not merely cheap journals but cheap books to be brought within the purchasing power of every worker for wages among us.

Those who live in the present time may imagine that these two actions of Mr. Gladstone were merely phases of finance, brought forward to balance a Budget, each having in itself no particular political significance, though both have had a beneficent political result. But—and especially in regard to the repeal of the Paper Duty—that is not so. Mr. Gladstone made his proposals in order to promote the spread of knowledge among the people; and they were bitterly opposed by the Tories, and especially in the House of Lords, for that very reason. The Peers in particular, who have always either mutilated or massacred every Liberal measure intended to increase the sum of popular knowledge and enlightenment, were most venomous in their antagonism to a scheme which would ensure the wide circulation of cheap newspapers and books; and, though they were beaten in the end, it was only after a very tough fight.

The history, indeed, of the long struggle for the repeal of what used to be called the taxes on knowledge is most enlightening as regards the relative attitude of the Liberal and the Tory towards freedom of thought and information among the people. The Liberal has always held that no nation can be considered free which is sunk in ignorance, and that the best way to remove the ignorance is to make learning cheap and easily obtainable. The Tory has taken precisely the other view, and has assiduously opposed the creation of a free and cheap press because of his instinctive feeling that the existence of such is incompatible with

the government of the country by an autocratic aristocracy. That the Liberal has won in the conflict is all to the good, but we must not forget that no thanks for this are due to the Tory.

The provision of a free and cheap press, however, would have been of little service to the people as a whole, if they had not been able to read ; and it is a matter of historic fact that the first endeavour to secure the provision of national education, as part of the nation's duty, was made by a Liberal Ministry. Yet, when this was put forward, the Tories contested it at every point ; and the Bishops, headed by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, carried the Peers with them by two to one in condemnation of a plan which gave teaching to the children of the working classes as a civil right and not as an ecclesiastical privilege. But the Liberals persisted in their desire to elevate the masses by means of education ; and the Education Act of 1870 passed by the Government of Mr. Gladstone, placed matters upon a broad popular footing, which the Tories more than once have tried to damage but have not been able to destroy.

And, just as the Liberal Party has faithfully and fearlessly struggled for free political thought, so it has for liberty in religious thinking. Those who do not care very much about either may ask whether this has had any practical result, and the answer is plain. It is no matter of ancient history but of the very last reign that those who conscientiously disagreed with the doctrines and practice of the Established Church were unable to be married without sharing in rites which to them were repugnant ; and it has been only within the last thirty years that a Nonconformist could be interred in the churchyards, which are the property of the nation, with a service which would have commended itself to his conscience. Even now, owing to the very recent action of the Bishops and their Tory allies in the House

of Lords, Nonconformists throughout the land have still to suffer several disabilities in the matter of the elementary education of their children. But for the removal of those disabilities, as for that of such others as remain upon honest differences of thought and action, the Liberal Party must be looked to in the present and the future, as it always has had to be looked to, and never in vain, in the past.

V.—FREEING THE PEOPLE'S THOUGHT.

PLAIN indication already has been given of how much Liberalism has done to free the people's food and the people's action, but something more is to be said as to freeing the people's thought. From the time of the earliest development of what, in the present-day sense, can be called Liberal Policy, the freeing of opinion from shackles has been its constant and consistent aim. Cromwell was the first of our statesmen to lay it down that men should not be disabled from holding public positions because of difference of opinion any more than because of accident of birth; and the most illustrious of his co-adjutors in the work of government—John Milton—blew a trumpet blast in favour of the liberty of the press, which has not ceased to sound even yet.

When we come to more recent times, it will be found that the Liberal Party have been steadfast throughout, in removing, in the face of prolonged and bitter opposition, the shackles which had been placed from time to time upon the free expression of opinion. It was due to their efforts that the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed—statutes which prevented any conscientious Nonconformist, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jew, from holding a public office or municipal trust, because, before holding such, he had to take the sacrament

according to the rites of the Established Church, and had to produce a certificate to that effect. And so meanly and malevolently was this degradation of true religion worked, that when, in the eighteenth century, it was desired to build a Mansion House for the Lord Mayor of London, the Corporation, composed entirely of Churchmen, raised the funds by year after year electing to high offices wealthy Nonconformists, knowing they would rather pay the heavy fine entailed by refusal to accept, than violate their conscience.

But the Liberal Party were never satisfied to remove the grievances of one class alone, whether political, religious, or social. They fought with the same persistence to relieve the Roman Catholics and the Jews as they did on behalf of the Protestant Dissenter and the Quaker, Moravian, and "Separatist," as by Act of Parliament they were collectively named. It was in the teeth of the most violent prejudice that the Liberals, aided by a few of the more enlightened Tories, steadily brought about such a change in public feeling as enabled the Roman Catholics and the Jews to be freed from the humiliating disabilities under which they so long had laboured, and allowed the Nonconformists to be baptised and married and interred by their own ministers, and in accordance with their conscientious opinions. Startling sometimes is it to find how utterly this is forgotten by many of those who rejoice in the liberties the Liberals have secured for them ; but, though long-lasting gratitude is scarcely to be expected in politics, it is useful to recall the Liberal services of the not distant past, because, as of late years we have seen, when re-action once sets in, the Tories return to their old clerical policy of penalising, if not persecuting, Nonconformity with an avidity which nothing but constant vigilance can check.

It is, of course, in the direction of national education that this reactionary tendency has been made most marked, for the Tory policy

throughout the controversy, now just a century long, has been to cripple the Nonconformist in order to help the Established Church. At the outset the endeavour was made by the Tories, and for some while it succeeded, to keep the whole machinery of elementary education in the hands of Churchmen, under the tutelage of the bishops. This the Liberals resisted from the first, but, owing to divisions of opinion among themselves as to the precise method of teaching religion in schools partly supported by public funds, they allowed the Church to obtain such a foothold, that, aided by the action of the late Tory Government, it now claims to have predominant right of control over schools for which the public pays a very large proportion of the whole cost ; and the Nonconformist consequently has to pay both in rates and taxes for the teaching of theological tenets and the adoption of ecclesiastical practices to which, in his conscience, he is deeply opposed.

When this keenly felt grievance is sought to be removed, a plea is tried to be set up that "the rights of the parent" rather than the privileges of the priest are in peril. It is at least singular that we never heard a syllable as to "the rights of the parent" to have his children taught some particular form of theology, at the expense of those who did not believe in it, as long as the Nonconformists were forced to send their offspring to Church schools and were denied all opportunity of having them instructed in their own religious beliefs. And throughout that time, the Conscience Clause in many parishes was worked in such a way that, if a Nonconformist child sought to avail himself of it he was treated almost as an outcast and was made to suffer at the most sensitive period of his life for the sin of not being a member of the dominant sect.

In this place, it is with what Liberals have done rather than with what they propose to do that we are dealing ; but in the special regard of education, the lesson of the past will inspire

the policy of the future. The Liberal Party have secured triumphs in the unshackling of religious as well as of political opinion by having a clear idea of what they wished in order to prevent the continued dominance of a single sect. That clear idea is necessary now, for they must by this time realize that the spirit with which they have to contend is in a sense the same exclusive and reactionary kind it ever was. The demand, therefore, is bound to become even more plain and persistent that all schools supported by public money shall be public schools—that is, that they should be controlled by those who pay for their upkeep, and that, in regard both to the teachers and the taught, they shall be free of access to all.

This demand may lead to another, and that is, while freeing the schools from clerical management, to liberate the Church from State control. The Irish Establishment was dealt with by law not far from forty years since; the Welsh and the Scottish Establishments are condemned, as far as their legal connection with the State is concerned, by the overwhelming majority of the Welsh and the Scottish peoples; and the time is rapidly approaching when the English people will be asked seriously to consider the question as to continuing their own Establishment. That is a matter for much controversy and very useful thought, for the task is one that would not lightly be undertaken. But the ideal of “A free Church in a free State” has been in accordance with Liberal thought all through the history of Liberalism, and the evolution of opinion towards it has been natural and necessary. For the doctrine of the Liberal Party is that no man ought to be penalised, any more than he ought to be promoted, because of his honestly held religious opinion. To assent to the contrary is to assist hypocrisy; and it is for freedom for honest opinion that the Liberals have always fought.

VI.—HOW THEY HAVE BEEN GAINED.

IN necessarily outline fashion, there have been told some of the most striking and abiding triumphs of Liberalism; and it may fairly be asked "How have they been gained?" Has it been because of a simple policy of opportunism, or vote-catching or popularity-hunting—a mere struggle between the Outs and Ins, the Kites and the Crows? To answer this in the affirmative would be not only to impugn the integrity of individuals, but to indict the whole nation, for a people that would allow itself to be "taken in" not once, but again and again, by an ignoble band of office-seekers, eager only for what they could snatch from the Imperial Exchequer, would deserve the worst fate that tyranny could send them. The true reason for the continuous, though occasionally checked, triumph of Liberalism in this country is that it has been based upon the bedrock principle of "Trust in the People." As the greatest of modern Liberal leaders, Mr. Gladstone, once phrased it, "The principle of Toryism is mistrust of the people, qualified by fear; the principle of Liberalism is trust in the people, qualified by prudence." The essential Liberal principle, in other words, and to employ the eloquent utterance of Abraham Lincoln, another of the finest soldiers of liberty the world has seen, has been to secure "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Liberals have always held that in striving for their old ideal, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," they were striving for the good of all; and it has been by preserving this wideness of outlook that they have been able to accomplish so much.

To assert this is not to deny that the Tory Party has been equally conscientious in endeavouring to carry out its steadfast theories that the many should be governed by the few, that a privileged class could best legislate for the remainder

of the community, and that, while much was to be done *for* the people, nothing was to be done *by* the people. Certainly that party's actions may plausibly be argued scarcely always to harmonize with these theories; but let its history be considered as a whole, and, from beginning to end, it will be seen that these are the principles which have dominated its course throughout. Granted that it is no longer considered politic to refer to the bulk of the working community as "the swinish multitude" or "the gullish herd"—terms of opprobrium once much in Tory vogue—the underlying contempt for the mass of the people peeps out again and again even now.

This is shown in marked, and often in malevolent, manner whenever the Liberals are in the majority at the polls. The Peers at once declare that they are not prepared to accept the popular verdict because it has been foolishly given, the calm assumption being that the mass of Liberal voters are fools. Many of their adherents in the constituencies carry this a step further by acting as if they considered that same mass to be rogues, meriting condign punishment. Hence it is that as landlords they dismiss labourers, as customers they boycott tradesmen, and as citizens they practise systematic intimidation in ways they would denounce in Ireland as criminal. This is not only because they have lost an electoral battle, but because it is in accordance with their principles to have a contempt for "the lower classes" who venture to have an opinion of their own; and that contempt finds its vent in efforts to ruin those who have only the courage of their conscience to sustain them.

In this, there is the essential difference of the point of view between the Liberal and the Tory; and it is just that difference which makes Liberalism, despite temporary drawbacks and discouragements, the more lastingly successful. What the Liberals continuously strive for is that the people should no longer be in leading

strings, but should be encouraged by education and example to choose their own leaders. They desire the masses to think for themselves, and to act as they think ; to take nothing for granted, but to insist upon a reason for everything ; to regard the world with open eyes, and to resolve faithfully to do as their conscience directs them. Given the realization of such desires, no Liberal need fear the future, for, however much allowance might have to be made for alternating action and re-action, ebb and flow in national opinion, there would be no doubt as to the principles which in the long run would prevail.

Any such doubt, indeed, has again and again been resolved into triumph by the fact that the Liberal Party throughout have striven to secure equality of opportunity for all. That all men are equal in ability, in character, or in energy, and that all therefore are equally entitled to share in the world's gifts, is what no one will seriously contend ; but what every Liberal will urge is that all men, in whatever station they may chance to be born, are entitled to an equal opportunity for displaying the ability, character, and energy they possess. This very statement strikes at the root of the Tory theory, with which it can in no way be harmonized, for the Liberal, while giving no privilege to birth, would accord every possibility to brains ; and that is precisely what no Tory true to his party principles could do.

Once and again it has been shown that the triumphs of Liberalism have gained for the people not only freedom of food but freedom of thought and freedom of action ; and these are blessings not lightly to be esteemed. When on occasion the masses are lured by false lights into a political morass, there is the temptation to wish that those who have allowed themselves, despite all warnings, thus to be deceived, should receive the full punishment of reaction. But, as the rain falls upon the just as well as upon the unjust, so do

the fruits of reaction poison us all: and therefore those who do not desire such noxious food must resolve to resist by every means its growth. The "give-the-other-side-a-turn" theory which many people act upon at election time is not merely fallacious but fatal as inspiring political conduct. There has been shown what the Liberals have done by steadily adhering, in sunshine and in storm, to certain fixed and excellent principles; and, in stating what has been done, there has been clearly indicated what can yet be done by walking along the same admirable road. And it is because Liberals are ever ready to take their stand upon these principles, and to act up to them at every opportunity, that we are convinced that the triumphs of Liberalism are still very far from at an end.

